Landmarks of a Gardener's Lifetime

MRS. THERON G. STRONG
Garden Club of Easthampton

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IT

Feb-19-1949
850 Park Ave

For

My dear Emily with
the love of her friend
the Ancient Jezebel

Martha Dorcas Strong

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LANDMARKS OF A GARDENER'S LIFETIME

MRS. THERON G. STRONG
Garden Club of Easthampton

PART I

Grace Court—Brooklyn Heights

1851. The earliest impression of a small child was of a fountain in a terraced garden of Brooklyn Heights. Beyond the privet hedge, one watched the constantly changing panorama of the East River; the passing sailing vessels between Governor's Island to the south and Castle Garden to the north; over the faraway Jersey coast magnificent sunsets—at times spectacular storms; the bright moving night-lights of the river traffic completed the enchanting and ever-changing scene. On the three terraces, trained and espaliered grew pear trees and small luscious green figs, vegetables, roses and pyramidal apple trees on the level spaces.

In the green houses camellias, abutilons, tube roses flourished, and Gloire de Dijon roses ran riot. On the Western Wall the thorny spines of a beautiful *Hylocereus undatus* (the night-blooming cereus) were trained. Bunches of Hamburg and Muscat grapes hung in the Cold House. Approach to this Garden of Eden was through a one block avenue of elms planted by my father—a large flowered *Magnolia macrophylla* and feathery pink tamarisk framed the entrancing view of the Harbor of New York.

EUROPEAN TRIP

June 8, 1872. Not a landmark but a delightful event in my life was my first European trip, June 8, 1872. We sailed on the last trip of the Cunard side-wheeler "Scotia." The steamers of that day were small—the passage ten days or more; many friends aboard; Cooks Tourist Agency not organized. We visited the Cathedral Towns, English and Scotch Lakes, Switzerland and France. London in the season was gay with fine equipages, gorgeous liveries, the Rotton Row Riders and Sunday life of Hyde Park. Attending the morning services of Westminster Abbey, I was much impressed with the grace and charm of the young English women, and the jeweled tiaras of the ancient dames in the boxes at the opera. The ivys I carried home, brought to mind for many years the lovely English lanes and hedgerows.

38 WEST 52ND STREET

1878. In due time, the child at her marriage left the Garden of Delights for the brown-stone Sahara of New York City. Happily the sun shone in this typical backyard garden of that day! A central grass plot—4 green clothes posts, one at each corner! Immediately back-yard gardening became of supreme interest—limited beauty was achieved by the cultivation of annuals, Forsythia, Weigelia, honeysuckle and Wisteria vines, and the city's own hardy tropical looking "Tree of Heaven" the *Ailanthus glandulosa.* Back-yard gardening was established in our neighborhood. On the street front of the house, *Ampelopsis Veitchii,* "The Boston Ivy" flourished, contributing bright green in the summer, and brilliant autumn crimson to the monotonous block of brown-stone houses!

1888. I had known only the exotics of the floral world. In the fields and woods of Norfolk, Connecticut, the charm and beauty of the wild flowers was revealed. From that time the study of

botany and horticulture became my avocation.

I corresponded with Prof. Asa Grey of Greys Botany; Prof. Charles H. Peck, New York State Botanist and eminent mycologist—and called on Dr. N. L. Britton, Prof. of Botany in Columbia College (situated at that time between 49th and 50th Street between Madison and Park Avenues) later Founder and Director in Chief of the New York Botanical Garden. With his kindly advice my Herbarium was started. After the marriage in 1885 of Elizabeth Gertrude Knight (a noted authority on mosses and ferns) to Dr. Britton, I attended at her invitation, the meetings of the Torry Botanical Club. On our wanderings in Europe and this country much time was spent in parks and invariably Chief Directors, Superintendents of Parks, Nurserymen, Obergartners and Untergartners named Hans, Pierre, Andy or Mike became my friends.

"FAIR ACRES"

1890. We became the happy possessors of several acres to the north of the south-side road of Long Island and built a colonial house: there began my practical work under the noted landscapist —Nathan F. Barrows, President in 1903 of the American Society of Landscape Architects. With his aid, a sunken garden was developed with recessed hedges of spruce; a pleached alée of pink and white hawthorn and many rare and beautiful shrubs and trees were planted. From Mr. Barrett I learned the value of tree and shrub screens and hedges for seclusion, with varied sky lines; the all-year importance of evergreens of varied contours and diversity of coloring, and for *accent!*—long open vistas and central lawns; varied shades of green with restraint—in colored shrubs and trees, the use of graceful vines; necessity of shade and charm of shadows; the spiritual beauty of water in the scheme, with ultimate harmony in blending all the parts to the whole composition and environment.

"THE DOLPHINS"

1898. Beginning life in the Terraced Garden of Brooklyn Heights at one end of Long Island; always longing for great open spaces and vistas, our faces were ever turned eastward, and in 1898 a treeless plain in East Hampton came into our possession, the Atlantic Ocean but 3 minutes' walk on the further side of the sand dunes. The only vegetation a few small privet and

honeysuckle. For a year I studied the situation—standing outside the fence — pencil and paper in hand, passing friends inquired what I was looking at. "At my shrubs and trees."—"But," said one of the oldest inhabitants, "only privet can survive the prevailing ocean winds!" Encouraged, however, by a friend who assured me that the fertile soil of the old wheat fields btween the dunes would grow anything *with protection;* and undaunted, I established a nursery and planted as years passed, all the beautiful trees and shrubs I knew. I bought small stock—expert tree movers were not to establish for me a forest over night. I must see my beautiful living things grow and develop. My motto: "plant thick—thin quick."

COLLECTOR OF CONIFERS

1908. Accompanying the Angler on salmon fishing trips over a period of years, we delighted in visits to our national parks, great plains, deserts and mountains. In 1908 the fishing was in the pools of the rivers of Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Cape Breton. That year I became a Collector of Trees. On the margins of highways, country roads, bordering lakes and streams by woodland and mountain trails, grow tiny evergreens a few inches high as symmetrical as the stateliest of the forest. I had visions of the development of these lovely miniature trees on our Long Island windswept meadow, "The Dolphins" on the lee of the first line of dunes of the Atlantic Ocean. With the aid of guide or ghillie we dug them carefully with the tool at hand—at one time a piece of iron tire picked up on the road — a sharp stone or woodman's knife. The roots were wrapped in sphagnum moss, and packed in a basket made of white birch bark; cord to carry them "Gold Thread" (the roots of a trailing wood plant). Planted with evergreens a few inches high—the tallest 9 inches, this miniature forest was a thing of beauty! As each little tree was labeled with its history, through the years of assembling, packing, repacking, planting and transplanting, to its full development of symmetrical beauty, they recalled delightful memories — an early morning walk to Artists Point in the Yellowstone Park, where I found two lodge pole pines by the recent footprints of a great bear hoof; canoe cedar from the rim of Mt. Rainier Glacier—Lake Louise in 1912 and the Iceland orange poppies which glorified my enclosed garden of "The Dolphins" for years,—the steep trail up to Mirror Lake when I added *Picea albertiana,* and *Abies lasiocarpa* to

my collection—of a late afternoon up the zig-zag Mt. Abbot trail to Lake Marion whence came my graceful mountain hemlock; two cypress from the 17-mile drive between the Rocky Mountains and Pacific Ocean. Memories of rushing rivers with the musical Indian names of Margaree, Miramochee; scotch broom hedges in full bloom in Victoria, wonderful National Parks, glaciers and snow-capped mountains! From the fishing grounds of the Canadian Atlantic, I assembled balsam, spruce, hackmatack arbor vitae, pines. As our trips led us to the Pacific Coast many trees were added—the botanical names of which I was ignorant, Dr. Britton of the New York Botanical Garden kindly suggested that I send specimens to the garden to be identified. With a chart, I mailed numbered branches of 49 trees to him—May 16, 1919. He wrote "I have your interesting letter . . . the package of evergreen branches has been handed to Mr. George V. Nash for identification . . . as he is more familiar with living conifers than anyone else here. I observed at a glance that you have brought together many interesting specimens." May 27, 1919, referring to the Collection of conifer twigs: "I return them to you with names attached:

Pinus monticola
Pinus Murrayana
Pinus contorta
Picea canadensis
Picea rubens
Picea Mariana
Picea Englemanni
Picea albertiana
Pseudotsuga mucronata
Abies balsamea
Abies lasiocarpa
Thuja plicata
Thuja occidentalis
Larriplaricina
Juniperus depressa
Tsuga heterophylla"

Seedling evergreens, Nova Scotia, Cape Breton, 1908.

First evergreen planted on lawn for Pinetum, May 27, 1911.

In the Pinetum. Photo by Dr. A. B. Stout

THE HURRICANE

Sept. 21, 1938. On that day the ocean winds took their toll of *eighty-one conifers* of the Pinetum of "The Dolphins."

October 1, 1938. Letter from Dr. A. B. Stout:

"We share with you in some measure at least, in the loss the hurricane brought to "The Dolphins." The negatives of the Pinetum I made in August should be yours. We shall feel richly repaid if they help to bring to you pleasant memories of the beauty you wrought."

1913. To that year on our automobile trip across Europe from Vienna I owe our Avenue of Trimmed planes. The oriental or London plane, *Plantanus acerifolia*, is of the first magnitude as well as *the* city tree par-excellence of the 20th century. It thrives notwithstanding asphalt pavements which retain gaseous vapors heated by steam, and keep moisture from the roots. The leaves develop late and are not subjected to untoward early spring conditions. The bark,—shed in large plates does not harbor blights, fungi or insects; the foliage is so strong that soot and gas affect the leaves but slightly.

In London, the trimmed plane has the sanction of royalty. From the Victoria Memorial Fountain before Buckingham Palace, down the Mall, were six rows of shapely pyramidal planes, and between the Palace Gardens and Green Park, five rows of these perfectly symmetrical trees beautify Coronation Hill.

It was planted in long avenues on the boulevards of Paris trimmed high and shallow for 20 ft. from the ground to avoid interfering with traffic on the one hand, and the air and light of the buildings on the other—(recalling these straight trimmed city trees, I am impressed with the mis-shapened trees of Park Avenue this year of 1948 in their supreme effort to find and live in the sun!). The extreme of severe pruning we found in an allée of the Belvedere Gardens of Vienna where the hawthorn hedges were clipped at the height of 12 feet and formed wonderful vistas. The planes in their finest natural development were in the Lichenstein Palace Park. The trunk of the largest was 7 yards in circumference. It towered above all other trees; was umbrageous of beautiful foliage and reminded me of the great trees of Oregon and Washington. This Garden founded in 1701 was refashioned in the English style in 1836.

Leaving Vienna, July 12, our run followed the course of the river Danube through beautiful wooded fertile valleys. The highlights of the trip to Frankfort were of the Tyrol snow mountains, famous old cities; splashing fountains, castles, vineyards, fields and fields of poppies, and peasants cultivating the land.

When in Frankfort very early August 13 with my camera I crossed the river Main to attend the Great Review on the Grossesand by Kaiser Wilhelm of his troops—the military event of the day was the field-grey uniforms worn that day for the first time and ordered for the 1st world war when Germany invaded France

in less than a year July 28, 1914. I made a photograph of the Kaiser leading his Uhlans!

Along the endless highways of Austria, Germany and France, the planes vied with the Lombardy poplars, lindens, fruit trees and acacias and in the neighborhood of the larger cities, the new plantings were planes.

To the motor trip from Vienna to London "The Dolphins" owes its Avenue of Trimmed Planes, not procurable from the nurseries I ordered regular stock. Tableaux. Our old gardener on a ladder, head and shoulders above the middle of the tree with shears in hand—standing below, the enthusiastic superintendent—directing each fateful cut. "A little higher up—no,—that's too high! Now! That's right—fine!" By the third year perfect symmetry was attained—the lower branches having a spread of 16 ft. and the canes of the past summer's growth measuring 10 feet. The annual pruning to preserve this hedge in air is the cause of trebling the size of the leaf—the shapely rounded well-balanced domes, giving broad shade and protection from sun, rain and wind!

Strolling under them I recall a late afternoon on Lake Geneva —a high stream of water from a lake fountain radiating all the

The Avenue of Trimmed Planes.

colors of the rainbow in its falling spray. The shadows of Mt. Blanc deepening on the lake—its snowy peaks shining in the sun and partly covered with a filmy drapery of bright clouds—the half-moon above in the blue sky. As the sun sets, faint rosy tints illumine the mountains, spreading over them and gradually deepening until lake and sky glow in color—a vision of loveliness.*

THE NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN

1919. Through the past years my association with the New York Botanical Garden has been fundamentally helpful and delightful. Invited by Dr. Nathaniel Lord Britton to become a member on April 3, 1919, Mrs. George W. Perkins was elected Chairman, and I became Secretary of the Women's Auxiliary. Four years later, the name of this Committee was changed to "The Advisory Council of the New York Botanical Garden."

HEMEROCALLIS

1923. Transplanted from the terraced garden of Brooklyn Heights to the garden of "The Dolphins" where it bloomed for many years, was the yellow fragrant daylily *Hemerocallis Flava* named by Linnaeus in 1762. It had been cultivated by clonal propagation for at least 192 years before. Seeing the hemerocallis creations of Dr. A. B. Stout at the New York Botanical Garden, I became extremely interested in their beauty and adaptability. In 1931 Dr. Stout kindly allowed me to name one. March 27, 1933, he wrote me "I am planning to divide the Clon "Theron" and am sending the painting, and one division to you for your garden, several divisions to Mr. Seyler, Propagator of the Farr Nurseries, one to be retained in the garden, one for my garden." January 20, 1934—in the *Gardener's Chronicle,* Covent Garden, London, was written, "The outstanding features of the 'Theron' Daylily, is the dark red coloring that approaches mahogany red. The name 'Theron' is in commemoration of Major Theron Roundale Strong (who was at the front in the 1st World War)."

For several years at the suggestion of Dr. Stout my plant was divided and sent to the Farr Nurseries. "Mr. Seyler would like to have a magic wand which would produce rapid multiplication

*August 26, 1948; *New York Times*—City's experts find new disease menacing shade trees in streets. Fungus first noted last year attacks London planes, which number 59,000. Here—spread believed checked.

of that choice 'Theron,' the public demand far surpasses the possibility of propagation. 1939,—"We have 100 of the clon 'Theron.' We need at least 500 before release." Three years later in 1942, "Theron" first appeared in the Farr Nursery catalogue as "Dr. Stout's, best mahogany red."

Between the years 1929-1941 the hemerocallis collection of "The Dolphins" was established. At the height of their blooming season a spray of lilies from each plant, the range in size, form and color tones from lightest yellow through the oranges was notable. Arranged in a large copper bowl, they glowed like jewels, and a spray of the mahogany red "Theron" gave the supreme touch in color and contrast!

In 1941 the daylily collection of "The Dolphins" of over 100 species including the majority of the hybrids that have been developed in the New York Botanical Garden, was transplanted to the notable garden of the old Clinton Academy of East Hampton, with a background of rare shrubs, ancient trees, violets and ferns in the borders.

Planned by Miss Marguerite M. Hoguet, President of the Garden Club of East Hampton, and Mrs. Samuel Seabury, on July 16, 1942, this daylily garden was formally opened. Miss Hoguet accepted it for the Club which will maintain it, and named the committee to superintend its care. Dr. Stout sent many specimens of Daylilies out from the trial garden for a special display, and beautiful arrangements of the lilies were made by members of the Club for the opening of this unique hemerocallis garden.

"It is not growing like a tree
In bulke doth make men better be
"A lillie for a day
Is fairer farre in May
Although it fall and die that night
It was the plant, and flower of light!"

BEN JOHNSON

THE CACTI

April 30, 1936. I made my first flight to my new world, the Arizona Desert—100 years after my mother and father sailed in a Packet Ship for England. The western wind carried them three thousand, three hundred miles in twenty-three days. Flying with the eastern wind over glistening cumulus clouds in an ocean of blue atmosphere, I looked through occasional azure rifts at the tops of green forests 8000 feet below, and in twenty hours ar-

rived at the mountain-fringed desert of Tucson, two thousand, two hundred and thirteen miles from the Newark Airport.* This Tucson desert of Arizona, owing to the size and great variety of cactus forms, provides the most striking cactus landscapes of the Western Hemisphere.

Immediately my study of the cacti became of absorbing interest, to me, an unknown flora save for the one beautiful cactus memory of my childhood. With camera and textbook on my seven o'clock morning walks, I photographed many species. In the Carnegie Library I studied the great authority—Britton & Rose "Cactacea" and the works of J. J. Thornber of the University, and Dr. Forest Shreve of the Desert Laboratory of the Carnegie Museum of Washington; made field trips with the Garden Club of Tucson, and Natural History Society to the unique Sahuaro Monument. Visited the Boyce Thompson South Western Arboretum of Superior Arizona devoted to the growth of sub-arid climates where the cacti grew in beautiful natural surroundings.

At an altitude of a half mile above sea-level, the giants of the cacti world *Carnegiea gigantea*, rose like immense fluted Greek columns in dense stands. Having no rings, their age cannot be definitely determined. Some are undoubtedly 250 years or more.

The opuntia is the next most impressive growth of the desert. This largest genus of the cacti is of great variety in form, spines,

*Sept. 19, 1948. As United States Air Force Day was marked with demonstrations throughout the nation and abroad, W. Stuart Symington, Secretary of the Air Force, disclosed in Detroit that the United States had set a world speed mark of 670.98 miles an hour.

Hylocereus undatus, "Reina de la Noche"—photograph by Dr. William Hartrich.

coloration and habit. Hiding in nooks, protecting rocky crevices are diminutive coryphantha and neomammillaria which seldom exceed six inches.

The flowers of the cacti great or small are all beautiful, of satiny sheen, exquisite in symmetry, and are in size and coloration of great variety. Generally dayflowers—a few are nocturnal. The flowers of the night bloomers are the largest (sometimes ten inches expanse) and of ethereal beauty requiring weeks to develop. At nightfall the great buds unfold their numerous white petals faintly pink-tinged, displaying countless yellow stamens—the expanded flower,—the most fragrant of all flowers vies in beauty with the rarest of orchids. Before morning this Queen of the Night has passed!

The traffic desert rules for man and beast are "Beware the Prickle!! Stop—Look—Touch and Step Carefully!!" In this fierce armored vegetation where leaves have become spines, thorns, glockids, nearly every plant is protected by a thorn!

As the Huntington Gardens of San Marino include the largest aggregation of desert specimens growing out of doors in the world, and its most spectacular group is the cacti native to the western hemisphere only—that was my Mecca!

With a letter of introduction from Dr. Marshall A. Howe, a former director of the New York Botanical Garden, I was kindly received at the Huntington Botanical Garden by the Director, Dr. William Hartrich. To the accompanying music of mocking birds, I was permitted, in the morning hours when the garden was not open to the public, to make photographs of this unique plant collection, the most comprehensive representation of *Zerophytes* in the world today! From Dr. Hartrich I received several of his lovely photographs of *Hylocereus* in bloom and learned from him that the wondrous cacti of my childhood memory was the most beautiful of the night-blooming cactus *"Hylocereus undatus"!*

The May maximum of 90° increasing rapidly through June to 114° made life difficult. After super-heated days, many rain clouds accumulated, fringed with long tails and sheets of rain that never reached the earth through the heated air. Frequently magnificent thunder storms, gales of wind, and torrents of rain swept over the mountains. As they passed land reverberations became fainter—the zig-zag lightning flashes could be seen miles away as the storm clouds passed over the desert. The setting sun brought relief from the appalling heat, and the climax of the sun's endeavor—the fleeting glory and unique splendor of a desert sunset—magnificent cloud effects, brilliant colors changing to opalescent and faun, were splashed across the sky by a mighty Artist; the west—an ocean of gold, the heavens aflame! "Then night took up the wondrous tale" . . . Under the scintillating starry heavens of this desert atmosphere, the tiny leaves of the mesquite opened; little desert animals reappeared; the night birds were on the wing and man revived!

On my return to "The Dolphins" I established a Rock Garden and cultivated the *Opuntia compressa*, the only native Eastern cactus. There, in their rocky environment and hot summer sun, they grew much larger than on their native dune and yearly brought forth profusely their exquisite yellow satiny flowers!

Sept. 19, 1933. Awarded the Horticultural Medal in Bronze of the Garden Club of America by the Garden Club of East Hampton at the Annual Meeting.

1925. After 40 happy years in our New York City home, 29 East 65th Street (where I cultivated my second backyard garden), I established my present home in the apartment—850 Park Avenue. Dwelling in country or city without a garden was unthinkable! A tiled court on the roof, enclosed in iron palings East, South and West,—the sky the boundless limit, became my great out-of-doors!

The frieze of the apartment house was of fine Italian design. After a period of years, it began to disintegrate—was condemned by the city and razed. I salvaged 3 lions' heads, a fine acanthus leafbracket and several finials. These I incorporated in my "Lions' Garden of 850." In time a lawn was made at one end of the east-west garden axis, the lions' heads flanked by shrubs and trees, the opposite end—outlining the garden space, green painted boxes 51 x 18 x 17 inches high, were established, with 2 green painted tubs 16 x 14 inches high between each box for plants, shrubs, trees and vines. Serious problems are faced in these roof, mid-air, sky-limit soil-less gardens, metal house walls, tiled floors, no shade, high winds, limited space, shallow planting in boxes and tubs, frigid cold and torrid heat!!!

These untoward conditions greatly limit the choice of garden material. Climbing and bush roses and many standard perennials were planted, but died! With a peat-moss mulch, daily late afternoon watering, weekly spraying with DX nicotine and sulphur dust, garden charm was achieved. The graceful quick growing very hardy Chinese fleece or silver lace vine *Polygonum Auberti* draped the iron grills framing the great city towers, forsythia, *Spirea prunifolia,* privet and virginia creeper flanked the building wall to the north with waving green and the city's own Chinese Tree of Heaven, the ailanthus added height and a tropical effect as the terminal branches of leaves moved in the wind. For accent, at intervals in the tubs pyramidal yew *Taxus cuspidata capitata* were installed with hardy Asters.

Among the dependable and extremely hardy plants for the boxes flanking both axis, were *Coreopsis lanciolata,* golden glow, funkia, golden rod, sedum and hemerocallis. "Picardy" (pink) geraniums in the 1st and 3rd boxes—"Improved Ricord" in the 2nd and 4th gave masses of color. Planted with them, English daisies, heliotrope, rose geranium, lemon verbena. The boxes were edged with pansies (seeds planted in September), marigolds

(seeds planted in spring), crysanthemums gave color until frost, and divisions to transplant in the spring. A long season of bloom was assured by two groups of tubs planted either with hemerocallis, petunias, dianthus, gypsophilla or lantana. Morning glories added charm in their season.

Of fundamental importance in roof gardens is the summer *mulch!* After planting, cultivate, fertilize, water—cover with 2 inches peat moss—water! For added garden charm—a colored eastern water-jar; a blooming azalea and a monthly rose in typical Chinese jars!!

Life in the Lions' Garden was always interesting. The care of the garden, reading, writing, with friends, and changing from day to day. One had but to glance upward for infinite interest and beauty,—at times limitless blue. Again the magic of wonderful cloud effects, of great cirrus and cumulus clouds, a noisy plane winging down into a brilliant sunset; the autumn flight of birds; the evening star; a crescent moon; dusk; the massive outlines of the great city buildings disappearing, their countless lights flashing in the darkness and the magic wonder and beauty of the transformation of the "Empire" building to an ethereal tower of jewels.

1947. The Chinese fleece vine was mantled with shimmering white; the "August Pioneer" daylily blooming; members of the large family connection still in their country homes, when a grandson requested that his wedding take place on the little lawn of the "Lions' Garden"—September 1947, as the sun was setting, long banners of cirrus luminous clouds above, the marriage was solemnized.

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